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# The Civil War Guerrilla: Unfolding the Black Flag in History, Memory, and Myth

Ralph Mann

# Review

**Mann, Ralph**

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**Beilein, Joseph M., Jr. and Hulbert, Matthew C..** *The Civil War Guerrilla: Unfolding the Black Flag in History, Memory, and Myth.* University Press of Kentucky, $50.00 ISBN 9780813165325

Revising Old Narratives of Guerrilla Warfare during the Civil War

This very valuable collection builds from the foundational works by Michael Fellman, *Inside War* (1989), and Daniel E. Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict* (2009). It aims, as the editors explain, to contextualize Fellman's analysis of the underlying social psychosis and Sutherland's sweeping survey of the decisive impact of guerrillas on the Civil War by taking into account prewar social conditions, ethnicity, traditions of guerrilla warfare, and above all, the centrality of slavery, race, and emancipation. The essays are also very aware of the self-serving mythologies and the rapid politicization of the guerrillas' personal accounts. Beginning with a heartfelt personal evocation of Fellman by Christopher Phillips, and concluding with an effective summary by Victoria Bynum, who calls for a synthesis of traditional narratives with new understandings of the guerrillas' war, the collection goes a long way toward achieving the goals set by the editors.

Rejecting Fellman's view that guerrilla brutality simply demonstrates the savagery lurking in all people once the veneer of civilization is torn away, Christopher Phillips examines Jo Shelby's 1863 raid across Missouri, finding it ultimately rooted in proslavery ideology. After an able summary of the conflict in Missouri, he concludes that the defense of slavery was central to that state's irregular warfare from the start. Shelby's raid, which targeted (presumedly antislavery) ethnic Germans and freedmen, especially those in Union uniforms, brought this ideology to a particularly violent culmination. Andrew William Fialka, by reading spatiotemporal patterns of guerrilla activity (also in Missouri), rejects the idea that it consisted simply of random acts of violence and retaliation. He finds that the movements of Union and Confederate armies

determined guerrilla activity, and that intermittent Union occupation undermined urban social cohesion and led to attacks. The rebel guerrillas tried to coordinate their activities with Confederate armies; after Sterling Price's invasion failed, guerrilla activities ceased.

Local conditions and experiences are determinative in the studies by David Brown and Patrick J. Doyle and by Megan Kate Nelson. Brown and Doyle take a comparative look at the Carolina piedmonts, finding prewar conditions closely correlated to levels of guerrilla activity. In piedmont South Carolina, where cotton and slavery were basic to the economy and the legitimacy of secession was not questioned, guerrilla activity was low. In North Carolina's piedmont, where cotton was not nearly as important and many plain farmers questioned both the institution of slavery and oppressive Confederate rule, antigovernment guerrillas flourished. Megan Kate Nelson, looking at Confederate imperial ambitions in the desert Southwest, finds them thwarted largely by Apache traditional guerrilla warfare practices. The Apaches saw the war as an opportunity to continue the raiding that was vital to their economic lives, and more importantly, to disrupt both Union and Confederate attempts to establish hegemony over their territories. Confederates, especially those in Henry Sibley's invasion force, suffered most; they could not fight both the Apaches and the Union army.

Guerrilla memory as a cultural artifact—especially, guerrillas' insistence that they were valuable and legitimate elements in the war as a whole—is another important theme in these essays. Matthew C. Hulbert takes a hard look at Thomas A. Goodman's *Thrilling Record*. Goodman, the lone survivor of the two Centralia massacres, memorialized the suffering Union victims of "fiends" like Bloody Bill Anderson; but postwar Northern sanitization of warfare and attempts to reconcile with defeated southerners made it hard for him to market his story. Goodman was overshadowed by pro-Confederate propagandist John Newman Edwards, who had already made men like Quantrill, Anderson, and Jesse James into chivalric heroes, forced to violence by Unionist atrocities. John S. Inscoe goes back to the beginnings of literary attempts to use guerrillas for political purposes, north and south. Reading *The Guerrillas*, an 1862 Richmond melodrama by John Dabney McCabe, Jr., and two Boston antislavery novels, *Cudjo's Cave* (1864) by John Townsend Trowbridge and *Among the Guerrillas* (1866) by Edmund Kirke, Inscoe finds, in addition to the standard portrayal of guerrillas as victims or monsters, some unexpected truths. There are serious attempts to understand the peoples of Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee,


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and unusual sympathy for them. More importantly, African Americans and southern ladies can transcend their expected places and play heroic parts, blacks and whites can cooperate to achieve common revolutionary goals, and mountain slaveholders can be Unionists. Despite all their heavy-handed use of lecherous villains and the like, and their scant understanding of the complexities of the war within a war in the Appalachians, these authors grasped its dramatic possibilities and provided their audiences with a reasonably accurate understanding of how the guerrilla conflict played out.

Rod Andrew, Jr. uses the tension between myth and history to reveal the character and motives of South Carolina's postwar "outlaw hero" Manse Jolly. In the myth, Jolly defends the planters and farmers of the Anderson area against federal attempts—especially by blacks in blue uniforms—to impose a new social and political structure. To Andrew, myth is a story with some basis in fact that serves some social purpose, in this case the restoration of white supremacy. In his legend, Jolly kills scores of insolent blacks and federals, but only in just revenge and in self-defense. In fact, he may have killed (only) four men, and he sold stolen federal horses, cotton, and military supplies in Augusta instead of redistributing them to needy neighbors. Nevertheless, he was, as the myth affirmed, protected by the white community from federal manhunts. To Andrew, the key was that Jolly's violence was political. His white supremacist goal was supported by his white community at the time and kept his story alive until the twentieth century.

Joseph M. Beilein, Jr. also explores how guerrilla memory was used and misused, by looking at the case of William H. Gregg, who rode with Quantrill. Gregg's memoir ignored slavery and emphasized what drove southern guerrillas to their actions. His biggest challenge was to explain away the atrocities committed during Quantrill's murderous raid on Lawrence, Kansas, where well over a hundred unarmed men were shot down. By this stage in the war, Gregg asserted, there were no true civilians in Kansas, Lawrence was filled with booty seized from Confederate Missourians, and Quantrill's aim was to return these goods to their rightful owners. Unfortunately for Gregg, he took his manuscript to William E. Connelley to publish. Connelley, a moralistic Kansas partisan, "pillaged" Gregg's story, casting Quantrill and his men as inhuman monsters, and created a version of the border war that still resonates with historians. Gregg's account has been largely dismissed or used selectively. Beilein argues that both Connelley's and Gregg's versions can be used—with extreme caution—to illuminate biases, and in the case of Gregg's original memoir, to

reveal the guerrillas as deeply flawed, bloody, slaveholding humans.

In her conclusion, Victoria Bynum also takes on the issue of guerrilla sources, noting that they have been lost because they are too blunt and bloody to mesh with efforts to sentimentalize the Civil War. She insists that they can be good primary sources, not only adding thrilling stories but also giving us a more inclusive, more complicated version of the war. Historians must account for their partisanship—as several essays in this collection have done—but also understand why they have been ignored.

These essays have accomplished much, but much remains to be done. Two of Sutherland's major points—that the South had a proclivity to irregular warfare, and that the civilian suffering caused by guerrillas and counterguerrillas decisively undermined loyalty to the Confederate government—have not been considered. And the behavior of Bill Anderson, Champ Ferguson, and Sam Hildebrand, who murdered and mutilated prisoners of war, killed people who might constitute a threat, and sometimes ignored the larger issues of the war to concentrate on bloody retribution, suggests that the interpretations of Michael Fellman still have much to tell us.

*Ralph Mann has retired from the University of Colorado, but continues to study guerrilla war and family subsistence in Appalachian Virginia.*


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